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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 000753

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MAPS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2019
TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: EIGHT FEARED DEAD IN PRESIDENTIAL PALACE
HELICOPTER CRASH

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The burning wreck of a Philippine helicopter belonging to the Presidential Airlift Wing has reportedly been located after going missing in the evening of April 7 in rugged mountainous northern Luzon. The craft carried a team of six government officials, including two undersecretaries, plus two crew members. By day's end, the charred remains of at least three victims of the crash had been located. The Ambassador remains in close contact with senior Philippine government officials who were very thankful for the U.S. air assets playing a vital role in ongoing search and recovery operations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) According to Armed Forces of the Philippine (AFP) authorities, a Bell 412 helicopter carrying a team of six Malacangang Palace officials and two crewmen went missing in the early evening of April 7. The Palace officials aboard the aircraft were reportedly making advance arrangements for an upcoming presidential visit. Media reports list two of the passengers as Undersecretary Marilou Frostrom of the Presidential Management Staff and Undersecretary Jose Capadocia Jr. of the Office of the Press Secretary.

¶3. (U) Initial reports indicate that the helicopter departed Baguio City at approximately 4:20 p.m. April 7, and was scheduled to arrive less than one hour later in Banuae, in nearby Ifugao Province, but on nearing its intended destination was forced to turn back due to bad weather. The Philippine Air Force, the lead agency in the search and recovery operations for the missing helicopter, received numerous reports from villagers along the Nueva Vizcaya - Ifugao provincial border area claiming that a helicopter had crashed in their vicinity. At approximately 3:30 p.m. Manila time April 8, media began to report that the burning wreckage had been sighted in a remote area near the village of Tinoc, on the Benguet-Ifugao provincial border, and Arroyo administration Chief of Staff Ed Ermita confirmed that PNP officers had reached the helicopter's burning crash site and recovered the charred remains of at least three individuals.

¶4. (U) AFP personnel first alerted Embassy DAO office the evening of April 7; Ambassador was contacted soon thereafter by AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Alexander Yano and Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap. Ambassador immediately organized an interagency crisis team including DAO, JUSMAG, JSOTF, and others to bring in assets as soon as possible. United States military assets are playing a vital role in ongoing search and rescue operations. Two U.S. helicopters, which were in country as part of the upcoming annual Balikatan bilateral military exercise, were deployed to assist in the search. The Mission also deployed an American military liaison

officer to the Philippine Air Force Operations Center to coordinate operations with Philippine counterparts throughout the night.

15. (C) COMMENT: The Philippine government has repeatedly thanked the Ambassador for continued USG assistance in ongoing search and rescue operations. Underscoring the Philippine government's appreciation for assistance from its longtime ally, Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Alexander Yano told the Ambassador, "We never have to beg you to help us. We never have to ask you twice."

KENNEY